THE RUSSIAN PEASANT
HIS WORLD BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

By

Glenna DeWitt

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Introduction

In a country in which even after the advent of the twentieth century the overwhelming majority of the people were still engaged in agricultural work, farming was not merely a vocation; it was a whole way of life.

Intimately interwoven with the traditions, the beliefs and prejudices of the people, it was a way of life that did not easily give way to innovations, either of practice or thought. Modifications were likely to come only when the existing structure failed completely to aid the peasants in a new situation, and even then they were likely to wear the lingering costumes of the old forms.

This conservatism of the peasant is perhaps understandable when we consider that in an agricultural life the most important thing is the land. And the changelessness of the land, which seasonal caprices serve only to accentuate, gives rise to a pervading belief that it is natural and right that things should remain as they are. While their practices concerning the land have been influenced by outside factors, this prime concern with the land has molded the peasants' conceptions of all the other influences in his life.

Such a people were the Russian peasants as the twentieth century approached. In the following pages we want to view the world of tradition of the Russian peasant as it had been built up over time, then attempt to mark what happened to this world as the peasant moved into the twentieth century.

In the earliest days of Russian history the land was in practice what it long continued to be in the conviction of the peasants: the joint property of all the people, who might own whatever they could make the stubborn soil give up, but never the soil itself.

These early cultivators were a nomadic people driven on periodically, partly by the inhospitability of the northern soil, and partly by the lure of the unbroken vastness of the Russian land, which offers few picturesque nooks, few spots with unique features to which one might become attached. Against this immensity one man alone seemed insignificant, and between the indifference of a harsh climate and the ravages of eastern tribes, one man alone had little chance to survive. Their social habits thus strengthened by fear, these nomadic cultivators from the earliest times lived closely together in little huddles scattered across the plains.

By the late middle ages these rural people had settled into three classes: at the bottom a rather numerous slave group, who had become such because of debt, the need for protection, or by conquest; secondly, a free roving agricultural labor class; and thirdly, the peasants rightly so called, who were members of the rural communes which sent delegate assessors to the Prince's Court.[1]

In the fifteenth century the system of sovereign princedoms was supplanted by a centralized Moscovite kingdom, as

a consequence of Moscovy's lead in overthrowing the Tartars. To buttress his power, the sovereign, or tsar, initiated a policy of granting lands to his faithful servers. These lands were granted in usufruct only, and at first only for the lifetime of that member of the family whose service to the tsar had warranted the award. The task of the peasants already using the land then became to supply this legal owner with a livelihood, but they were still attached neither to the owner nor to the soil. The freedom to serve whom they wished and to move from one place to another was recognized in practice usually at the time of the feast of St. George, which marked the end of the agricultural year. For a week before and a week after the feast day the peasant might take his leave. Remembering what this day meant, the peasants have made its name part of many proverbial expressions of disappointment.[2]

The value of the land to the proprietors depended, of course, on its being worked. With the nomadic tendencies of the rural population and the temptation of the rich and never-ending steppe, the grasslands onto which Russian colonists had emerged in the sixteenth century, legal authority holding the peasants to the soil became more and more necessary to the landlords. Those who received grants in the new black soil regions of the steppe especially clamored for restrictions, for the fertility of the soil promised unheard of returns if only the owners could fill their lands with cultivators. With rich free lands just beyond, however, settlers could not be induced to remain on the lands of the landowners.

The tsars realized that their grants had no value without labor; they also found it difficult to get fulfillment of State dues and duties with such a migratory population. There was, therefore, a gradual tightening from above the peasants' freedom of passage, which reached its climax under Boris Gudonow with an edict abolishing completely free passage from one estate to another.[3] This occurred in 1593, and by that time an inability to discharge their increasing economic obligations to their overlords had already prevented many from leaving a particular estate.

The binding of the peasant to the earth brought inevitably in its wake personal bondage for him, furthered by an edict of 1675 which legitimatized the sale of serfs apart from the land. The limitations imposed on the peasant, though, in the early days had their counterpart in those which rested none too lightly on the nobility. The latter, under the iron hand of Peter the Great became mere privileged servants of a State in which every man had his fixed price. Nobles had to perform some task in the military or civil service, both of which were ranked into fourteen grades through which a person might advance. According to some authorities, these laws forcing the nobles to spend the best part of their lives in state service and leave the management of their estates to incompetent stewards were the original cause of the indebtedness of the landowning class, which came to be a hereditary peculiarity of that class.

In 1762, however, with Peter III, the nobility was released from obligatory service to the State, and under Catherine the Great, who was attempting to secure her position by courting the favor of the nobility, the landowners were further freed from State restrictions. These acts were primarily part of the effort, which continued throughout the succeeding century, to strengthen the economic position of the landed nobility. The means very often employed was the creation of mortgage banks by which the State lent money to the nobility at a low rate of interest. These institutions seem in the long run to have fostered rather than cured the improvidence of many of the proprietors, and by the time of the Emancipation the landowners were deep in debts, with 69 per cent of their serfs mortgaged.[4]

An any rate, the system of complete serfdom thus reached its peak in the late eighteenth century when peasants became merely the movable property of landowners no longer bound by duty to the State. The peasants had always upheld the authority of the tsar, even as it came through the landowners, but they did not feel that a system which freed the nobility from their obligations to the State, yet did not free the peasant from his obligations to the landlord, could have been meant by the tsar. These feelings flared up into a mass rebellion in 1773; significantly enough, it was a rebellion directed not against the State but against the landlords, and its leader, Pugachev, was believed by his followers to be Peter III returning to the throne to oust the pretenders.

The popular identification of the tsar with the people and with their cause is a continuing factor through much of Russian history. This faith in the tsar was justified during the reigns of the next two rulers by only a few rather feeble attempts at reform, and the French invasion in 1812 found a people still completely in the thrall of serfdom. The peasants nevertheless, abandoned their own immediate anti-serfholder cause when it would have been most profitable in order to fight unrelentingly for the tsar and the Russian land.

Nicholas I, who succeeded Alexander I in 1885, proved unreceptive to any sweeping agrarian reform. In making our first careful scrutiny of the Russian peasant as he approaches the twentieth century, therefore, we find the mid-nineteenth century muzhik legally and economically what the origin of his name signifies--a "little man" or "half man."[5]

Most of the rural population of Russia at this time belonged to one of two legal classifications: they were either serfs belonging to some landed proprietor, or they were Crown peasants, inhabiting State lands and for all practical purposes serfs of the State. Economically, too, the two groups could be roughly differentiated according to this legal classification. The State peasants were free from the most galling personal oppression and from the most relentless economic demands, as the local government appointees usually did not go to the desperate extremes of a landowner facing bankruptcy;[6] consequently, the State peasants were more independent and better off economically.

Their allotments were on the average somewhat larger than those of serfs, and the government had in 1842 taken action to increase the size of the smallest ones at the expense of the largest. The State peasants paid dues to the government which were based on their total incomes. They, therefore, had to pay on income from other than agricultural sources; nevertheless, these dues all told were definitely more moderate than those which private serfs had to pay.[7]

The state of being of the peasants belonging to private landowners, of course, varied with the masters; but this variance in itself is partly a sign of the heaviest burden of serfdom: the subjecting of personality to the caprices of one person. This subjection was carried to its extreme by the law, existing until 1858, which allowed the master at will to convert the serf on his land to a wholly dependent landless man, or "courtyard person" who, with the loss of his share in the communal land lost his last shred of independence.[8] In Turgenev's story, Mumu, the mute giant plowman, who at the momentary whim of his mistress was torn up from his soil and brought to town to sweep her courtyard, is an unforgettable victim of such capricious power. The existence of this law took the teeth out of any reform regulations, such as that of 1798 prohibiting the sale of serfs apart from the land, and that of 1827 requiring landlords to sell a minimum of land with each village serf sold.[9]

The laws for the protection of the serfs were not strong, but even those measures that existed were effectively nullified

by the fact that in most cases the dispenser of justice was the landlord himself. The proprietor was compelled to surrender the serf to public justice only if the offense was an extremely serious one, or if the injured party was not a member of the estate and wished to carry the matter to public authorities. Under the system of manorial justice, the powers of the proprietors were so wide, both to judge and to punish, that they could enforce compliance with almost anything they wished. With the code of 1833 the landlord was authorized to use for the maintenance of law and order any means of correction which would not result in death or mutilation. Confinement and flogging were the most common means of punishment, and for the latter a great variety of devilish instruments had been perfected. The landlord was also free to send offenders into military service or to banish them to Siberia.

Severe punishment was provided by law for those serfs who complained against their masters, and until 1858 no distinction was made between just and unjust complaints. Serious abuses on the part of the landlord were pretty well left alone even when discovered, because state justice and law enforcement depended largely upon members of the landowning class or officals under their control. The peasants were undoubtedly right in believing that if the tsar could have been informed he would have punished the abusers, but as the Russian proverb said, "Heaven is high, and the Tsar is far off."[10]

The assessments on peasants of privately-owned lands were of two types: the <u>obrok</u>, or money payment to the proprietor;

and the barshchina, or forced labor services on the proprietor's private land--that is, the land whose yield went completely and directly to the landlord. By the Code of 1857 the pressure of these exactions was legally limited: the master should not require more than three days labor per week, and the master should not ruin the serf with his exactions.[11] Needless to say, the regulations were not taken seriously by the serfholder.

Though these two types of assessments were found intermingled geographically, and even both required of the same serfs, there emerges in the general geographic distribution of the obrok and the barshchina a pattern which corresponds to the main geographical features of agrarian Russia. The Russian countryside, for all its immensity of territory, shows an amazing degree of uniformity of farming. One of the most important causes of this uniformity is undoubtedly the flatness of the country, which leads to the use of the same systems of farming over vast tracts of land.[12] There is, however, in the agricultural map of Russia, a rough line of division which swings in a huge arc diagonally from the central eastern region to the northwestern region; in the more northern and eastern section we have the remains of great forest lands, and in the southern and western section the more newly cultivated vast grasslands or steppe. In the northern region where the yield is poorer, the tendency was to emphasize money payment, which might be raised by the peasant in any way possible, and thus to minimize direct supervision of his labor. The State lands, in general radiating from Moscow, were to be found

largely within this northern section. The rich Black Earth region of the south, on the other hand, with its fabulous yield, proved more profitable to the owner when under his direct cultivation. In this region, therefore, the barshchina, or forced labor service, was predominant.

As the Emancipation drew near apparently more than twice as many serfs were on barshchina as on obrok, but the proportion who rendered both was increasing as the dues and duties of the serfs grew heavier. Even those peasants of the almost completely agriculturalized black earth region were finding it necessary to seek work outside the estate in order to meet their obligations. This happened because they found their allotments shrinking, between the multiplying serf population and the extension of direct cultivation by the landlords in their attempt to remain solvent. These peasants of the steppe found their chief source of money earnings in agricultural wage-work, perhaps on a nearby estate, perhaps by seasonal migration to the frontier after their own season was over. In the central forest regions outside earnings were raised largely from non-agricultural sources: from urban wage-work, or from craft production at home--the "domestic system" was developing--or from trade, often of the peddler type.

In all regions of agricultural Russia the principal method of farming for the peasant land was some variation of the strip-cropping system and the three-field crop rotation system. Instead of the latter, however, which consisted of planting two fields and letting one lie fallow, in many parts of Russia the

peasants still merely used a field for a while and then let it lie fallow for a long time. The strip-cropping system divided the arable land into long strips which were apportioned among the peasants with an attempted equality as to good and bad land, and nearness to and distance from the village. Pasture lands and forests were generally used in common by all the members of the village.

The legal holder of the land used by the peasants for their own profit was the village commune, or **mir.** This agrarian institution, so indelibly identified with Russian peasant life, and the object of such heated controversy among nineteenth century Russian thinkers, functioned not only as common holder of the land, but also as the smallest fiscal unit of rural Russia. The state taxed the peasants per head as of the last census, that is per "revision soul," and collected the taxes from the commune as a whole. The d**uti**es of the mir thus became a mixture of agricultural and administrative. Common landholding demanded common decisions concerning crop distribution, times of planting and harvest, the keeping up of certain fixed assets, the pasturing of animals, and similar activities. Collective responsibility for taxes required a certain attention to the responsibilities of each on the part of all, and inversely, implied a certain responsibility on the part of the group to see that each had the means to raise his share of the taxes. And as the taxes amounted to the same for each member of the commune, the members needed equitable means of production.

The demands for economic equality among members of the commune gave rise in the sixteenth century to the practice of periodically redistributing the land among the member families of the commune. First used generally in the central forest region,[13] the practice spread during the next three centuries more and more widely throughout the country, on the state lands as well as on those of the nobility. This periodic reapportionment of arable lands to adjust to the changes wrought by time in families varied in time lapse and also in method of redivision with the different communes. The redivision was done sometimes according to the number of working members of both sexes, sometimes according to the number of census males, sometimes according to the working strength of the family, and occasionally according to the number of mouths to be fed.[14]

By the time of the Emancipation, three-fourths of the peasant land of European Russia was held by redistributive communes,[15] though partial redistribution was practiced much more commonly than complete redistribution. There existed, however, many communes whose member families held the lands they used by heritable tenure. This type of commune was found mainly in the West, especially in the Ukraine.[16]

The power that the mir, with the above combination of duties, could wield over its individual members was even more enhanced by the growth of serfdom. Under this system the landowner left to the mir the raising of the money payment due to him by the peasants and the regulation of his labor demands, which included, in addition to the barshchina, upkeep of roads, bridges, and the like.

The village assembly, which made the decisions, consisted of the heads of the various village households, the latter usually being families of three generations who held their land in common and were thus the smallest units of the commune. The head of the household was usually the male elder of the family (in some cases it might be a widow), who had the final say over his own family and their land. These household heads elected periodically from among themselves an Elder, who was thus officially the principal personage of the village.

The village assembly met in the open, and with an apparent lack of any strict rules of procedure, made their decisions by acclamation, except for infrequent cases when opinion was so divided that count by groups was taken. In such cases the minority quickly submitted, "for no one ever dreams of opposing openly the will of the mir."[17] Makenzie Wallace describes the decision of such a village meeting in this way:

> The Elder comes prominently forward only when it is necessary to take the sense of the meeting. On such occasions he may stand back a little from the crowd and say, 'Well, orthodox, have you decided so?' and the crowd will probably shout, 'Ládno! ládno!' that is to say, 'Agreed, agreed!'[18]

Paradoxical as it may seem, it was the great Autocrat himself, Nicholas I, who, attempting to regulate the procedure of the village assemblies, introduced voting by ballot. But the peasants did not take to the new custom, and called it contemptuously, "playing at marbles."[19]

The mir, from our earliest glimpse of it, seems obviously to have had for the people a meaning beyond that of a mere

administrative unit; it has been imbued with a certain mystical significance, apparently connected with the deeply ingrained Russian belief that a congregation of the faithful is the repository of truth.[20] Baron von Haxthausen, who is credited with bringing the mir to the attention of Western Europe and educated Russia, in his extensive travels through European Russia in the mid-nineteenth century was struck with the belief of the people in the power, right, and sacredness of the mir, and repeats a number of indicative proverbs such as:

> God alone directs the Mir.
> Throw everything upon the mir, it will carry all.
> The mir sighs, and the rock is rent asunder.
> A thread of the mir becomes a shirt for the naked.
> No one in the world can separate from the mir,
> What is decided by the mir must come to pass.[21]

The household or family, which, as has been pointed out, was the basic unit of the commune, was in many ways a small commune in itself. The members owned in common their house, and a small garden patch surrounding it, and their share of the arable lands. The father represented the family in the village assembly, and was by tradition absolute master of the household, which usually consisted of his wife, his sons and daughters-in-law and their children, and perhaps some yet unmarried daughters, regarded as only temporary inmates. For the working unit of Russian agriculture was a man, a woman, and a horse, and a woman's place was not in her father's house but in the fields with her husband. A pair of strong arms was thus the prime requisite to the old mother as she looked around for wives for her sons. This substitution of economic necessity for romance in marriage customs, while far from being unique to

Russia, was apparently more complete in the country than elsewhere, gave birth to a whole collection of doleful wedding songs.[22]

The fear and sorrow expressed in some of these songs were perhaps not exaggerated when we realize that wife-beating was indulged in freely by the Russian peasant husband. It was not uncommon, also, especially in regions where the obrok was predominant, for the husband to take leave of his wife soon after marriage for wage-work in some distant place, abandoning her to his family.

The inner life of the household was lorded over by the old mother, who often was the nagging, scolding creature described in Chekhov's Peasants. Her domain was usually a one-room wooden building whose main feature was the big stove covered over with the sleeping platform, where most of the family might be found lolling during the long cold winter months. They gathered around the stove, too, in the long winter when farming was at a standstill for spinning or carving or similar activity to fill their own needs and perhaps to earn money. In the front corner stood an icon before which everyone bowed and crossed himself upon entering, and which would perhaps be covered before a sinful act was committed.

The rites of the Orthodox Church were an integral part of the peasant's life, and in the performance of these rites he had an unbounded and childlike confidence. Wallace says about the Russian peasants:

> They go to church regularly on Sundays and on holy-days, cross themselves repeatedly when they pass a church or Icon, take the Hold Communion at stated

> seasons, rigorously abstain from animal food--not only on Wednesdays and Fridays, but also during Lent and the other long fasts--make occasional pilgrimages to holy shrines, and, in a word, fulfill punctiliously the ceremonial observances which they suppose necessary for salvation. But here their religiousness ends. They are generally profoundly ignorant of religious doctrine, and know little or nothing of Holy Writ.[23]

These rites were, for the most part, divorced in the mind of the peasant from moral obligations, in the Western Christian sense of the term. A robber would kill a traveler and steal all the man had, but refrain from eating a piece of cooked meat he might find in the cart because it happened to be a fast-day. A peasant preparing to rob a young official whom he ultimately killed, went to the church and commended his undertaking to the saints.[24] These examples may be extreme, but they are illustrative of a general tendency to regard the church rites more as magic than as spiritual aids. Furthermore, celebrations of the church festival days were usually times of general debauchery, often ending in deeds of voilence.

This religion owed much of its crudeness to the fact that it was actually a dual religion, compounded of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Slavic paganism. The minor Slavic deities, who represented most clearly the forces of nature, remained a living past of the people's religion, whether still in their ancient form, or under the names of Christian saints. Under this polytheism, there was an even more primitive religious layer--witchcraft. Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, traveling through Russia in the late nineteenth century, said: "...in no modern country is the belief in magic spells, the fear of the evil eye and evil omens, the faith in dreams and incantations so

universal and robust. Few indeed are the villages that have not their wizard or 'wise woman'..."[25] In all times of public and private calamities, the peasant regularly had the evil spirits exorcised from his fields by the wizard after he had had it blessed by the priest, so that he felt safe on both sides. Heathen ceremonies were used to drive away the cattle plague, and priests were sometimes compelled by the villagers to use ancestral rites along with those of the church in attempting to rid the community of an epidemic.[26]

The parish priest whose job it was to administer to these people bound by ignorance, who said of themselves, "We are dark people," was often not much more educated than they. He was a member of the White Clergy, whose members lived among the people and married and raised families, as distinguished from the Black, or monastic, Clergy, whose members furnished most of the higher officials of the Church. He was usually nearly as poor as the peasants themselves, and being dependent on them, he was often despised by the peasants for his grasping manner. But they never questioned their need for him as dispenser of the rites of the Orthodox Church. Under his sign they initiated the various agricultural seasons, and with his blessing they were born and they died.

The church which the priest represented was a national church directed by the Holy Synod, an ecclesiastical council whose head, the procurator, was appointed by the tsar. This had been true since the days of Peter the Great, who ended the Russian Patriarchate. The tsar, was, in relation to the church

as a whole, merely the defender and preserver of the dogmas, which he could not modify; at the same time he was the chief administrator, and used the Synod as an instrument. The Church was apparently subordinate to civil power, but the latter rested on religious faith.

> To the peasant, the tsar is the representative of God, delegated by Heaven to rule the nation. That is the source of the devout feeling with which the peasant regards the anointed of the Lord. That is why he renders to the sovereign an homage almost superstitious, why he bows to the earth before him and sometimes crosses himself as he passes by, just as at the passage of holy ikons. This also accounts for the extreme docility which abides in the masses, for the distaste which a large portion of the nation manifest for political liberties. If the tsar rules in the name of God, is not resistance against him impiety?[27]

To the Russian people the power of the Church and Tsar rested on something even more fundamental--the Russian land. Christianity in Russia had been transfigured by a natural religion that went deeper than a mere deification of the forces of nature, and attained to a real mysticism of the land. "The religion of the soil is very strong in the Russian people; it lies down deep in the very foundations of the Russian soul."[28] This mystic feeling about the soil had, on the other hand, gained a new element from its fusion with Christianity. It became imbued with the messianic consciousness found in the apocryphal books, a part of Christian literature that had an enormous influence in Russia.[29]

The world of the muzhik in the middle of the nineteenth century was little different from that of his grandfather,

or great-grandfather. It was a world bounded by the Russian land with its demands on him and his love for it, by the rites of the Orthodox Church, and by Imperial ukazes. These forces, interwoven, formed the fabric on which each muzhik's life was painted.

The harshness of the Russian climate, with its extremes of heat and cold, and the monotony and inhospitality of the Russian land, against which the peasant had to struggle in order to wring from the soil a mere sustenance, molded him and his institutions. It developed in him a ruggedness, the other side of which was a coarseness, a certain insensitivity, which could be seen in his often brutal treatment of women and animals. His customs were necessarily subordinated to agricultural practice. Religion provided a time framework of festival days for the performance of his agricultural duties, and religious rites and agricultural rites reinforced each other. The tsar, whose sanctions were intermixed with those of the Orthodox Church, was not only an earthly representation of divine power, but also a symbol of the Russian people and their land. His word was thus imbued with the sacredness of the congregation, and, like that of the Church, like that of the seasons, was not to be broken. Serfdom itself had come, not so much by the pushing down of the weak by the strong, but through Imperial ukazes.

The mir, which continued to regulate their daily lives, though now itself ruled from the master's mansion, was a long-maturing outgrowth of a people's attempt to deal with the

Russian land, strengthened and developed by State demands upon the collective group, and charged by its members with a certain religious feeling. The joint household, too, was evidently the product of indigenous economic factors and of political forces from outside, and though communal in inception, it was in practice surrounded with the same patriarchal aura as the Church and the Tsar.

The muzhik himself was a good-natured person, for the most part, but as if a reflection on the Russian climate, a creature of extremes, capable of violent deeds in rash moments, and inconstant in his intentions. Along with a certain credulity, he had a great deal of common sense, and where his interests were concerned he had "the cunning of the devil."

Long dwarfed by the vastness of the land, humbled by a religion which encouraged his passivity, accustomed to decrees from the tsar, often drained by poverty and now oppressed by a personal bondage, the Russian peasant had developed a placidity that amazed his onlookers. Seeming to recognize that the future could hold little for him, he lost himself in the pleasures of the moment. And when he died he seemed to do so neither fearfully nor unwillingly. Turgenev said: "Tis wonderful how the Russian man dies! It is impossible to call his condition before the end indifference or stupidity; he dies, as though he were performing a rite, coldly and simply."[30] While he lived he did as little work as he could, drank heavily whenever he had the chance, and was likely to spend his free time dancing and singing. Indeed, songs accompanied most of

his tasks. Travelers through Russia exclaimed that they had never heard a people who sang so much.

But the songs themselves were often monotonous and sombre in tone and melancholy in theme, sometimes deepening into the despair of that one which ends:

> And when I shall have fled from sorrow into the damp earth--
> Sorrow will come after me with a spade.
> Then will Sorrow stand over me, and cry triumphantly
> 'I have driven, I have driven, the maiden into the damp earth.'[31]

The songs merely reflected the life of the peasant, a life bound throughout by decisions made outside the peasant himself: by the Commune, by the master, by the Church and Tsar, by nature. Yet it was a life that contained undying convictions about a certain kind of freedom--freedom of the land, which was manifest in the peasants' reply to their masters: "We are yours, but the land is ours!"[32]

Since the reign of Paul I, at the turn of the century, liberal thinkers had been protesting the immorality of personal bondage and urging changes. Under Nicholas' reign, which saw the continuing development of that amazing literary activity which was to imprint nineteenth century Russia on the pages of the world's great literature, writers and thinkers cried for reforms, in spite of a strong imperial censorship. Many landowners were also persuaded of the economic and moral backwardness of the serf system; there was an increasing belief that the system was not sound economically, that the inefficiency and outright carelessness of a forced labor system was responsible in large part for the obviously weakening financial condition of the landowning nobility.[33] As the effect of this hovering bankruptcy on the landowner was often the instituting of an even more oppressive and abusive policy toward his serfs, about the middle of the century the system seemed to be tightening rather than weakening. Such liberals as Alexander Herzen denounced vehemently an institution which could bind one man to another even though the bound man became financially independent and was eager to buy his freedom for any sum.[34] And the multiplying instances of anti-serfholder disturbances on the part of the peasants alarmed the government.

With the stinging defeat of the Crimean War in 1854-55 the government was jolted into action, for it became evident that in order to remain a world power Russia would have to strengthen her internal structure. The more liberal Alexander II

had come to the throne in 1855, and with this realization in mind, and also with a traditional tsarist concern for the existence of a class whose members made up the mass of his subjects and were the economic backbone of the country, the new Tsar initiated a policy of reforms. After some years of maneuvering, he managed to effect, with his liberal helpers, the great task of freeing the peasant class and arranging for land for them and compensation for their owners.

The Emancipation Edict was signed on March 3, 1861, giving to over 20 million persons the civil rights of the free rural classes and replacing the authority of the proprietor with that of the Communal self government.[35]

For purposes of land settlement Russia was divided into four principal areas, and a special statute issued for each according to the existing agrarian relations of that region. There were thus throughout the country many variations of land settlement, but all aimed at providing for each male peasant an allotment of arable land according to a maximum-minimum norm established for each region. If the peasants of a village held at the time of the Emancipation less land than the minimum for that locale, the land would be supplemented by enough from the estate of the landowner to bring it up to the norm; on the other hand if they held more than the minimum, the landowner was entitled to keep the balance over and above it.[36] These lands which the landlord could keep became the illfamed "cuttings."[37]

The allotments that the peasants received were, according to the General Statute, to be held in perpetual usufruct,

against the payment of a certain rent to the titular holder. Redemption was optional and left to agreement of the commune and the landowner. By the Redemption Statute of 1863 redemption of the house and garden area by the peasant was made compulsory. Though the redemption of arable land was still left to the agreement of the owner and the commune, if the settlement was undertaken the State agreed to lend the peasants up to 80 per cent of the purchase price, the balance to be paid by the peasants themselves. The government arranged to pay the landowner in redemption bonds, and the peasants were to repay the government over a period of 49½ years, during which time they paid 6 per cent yearly in interest and repayment.[38]

If no agreement could be reached between the owner and the commune and the owner so wished, he could demand a compulsory settlement by agreeing to forego the 20 per cent balance of the redemption, owed to him by the peasants personally. In 1861 individuals belonging to a redistributive commune, who were able to redeem their land before the redemption period was up, were authorized to do so, and their land would thereupon become the heritable property of the household. This authorization, and that which enabled whole communes, by a decision of a two-thirds majority of the village meeting, to abandon communal tenure and adopt heritable household tenure would indicate that, though the land was given to the commune, the framers of the Statutes of 1861 contemplated moving towards the individualization of peasant land property.[39]

On the heels of the Emancipation came further reforms, which would provide some means for the peasant to exercise his rights as a member of a free class. In order to give the peasant some legal control over the affairs of his life, provincial administration had to be reorganized. Peasant self-government was to be organized on the basis of the Commune; a number of communes were combined to form a volost, each of which was to have assemblymen, judges, an "elder," and other officials elected directly or indirectly by the householders of the Volost.[40] Its action was confined exclusively to the peasantry. In 1864 new organs of local self-government, the Zemstvos, were set up, whose assemblies were to consist of representatives from all classes of a larger district, in proportion to the extent of their lands. The zemstvo was a local administrative unit to take care of the wider public wants which individual communes could not satisfy; its main duties were to keep roads and bridges, to look after primary education and local sanitation, to watch the crops and provide against famine, and to take similar measures for the general welfare.[41] In the same year, 1864, the tsar approved legislation setting up a new court system. The bases of the new system were two sections of courts, one dealing with more serious cases, the other--the Justice of Peace Courts--dealing with small cases and conducted throughout in an informal manner.[42] The latter courts were very popular for a time after they were set up. In 1874 the military system underwent reforms. Now, instead of the recruits having to sign their lives away with a twenty-five year term, almost everyone would be expected to go for six years.

When we next examine the peasant and his world, some thirty years after the Emancipation, we find that post-Emancipation Russia is neither the paradise that the peasant contemplated, nor the healthy state Alexander II thought he was creating.

To the peasant, with his deep conviction that the land in reality belonged to him, the Emancipation was to have removed from him both the burden of working for someone else and the burden of paying someone else, leaving him free to enjoy completely what he could get from his soil. In addition, he expected the private lands of the landowner to handed over to the commune.

From the first, therefore, the muzhik did not understand why he should have to pay for what rightfully belonged to him anyway, that which the tsar had so graciously just restored to him. Many peasants believed that the real Emancipation Law was being hidden by the proprietors, and this belief was fostered, whether from intention or from over-active imagination, by persons who professed to know what the real law contained. In one locality the rumor took hold that the Tsar sat daily on a golden throne in the Crimea, receiving all peasants who came to him, and giving them as much land as they desired; in order to take advantage of the Imperial liberality a large body of peasants set out for the Crimea and had to be stopped by the military. An embryonic Pugachev rose in one locale, declaring himself a prophet and the Emancipation Law a forgery, and gathered around him a group which had to be dispersed with bloodshed by the military authorities. There was nowhere any organized resistance, however, and the peasants soon came to

understand, if not to enjoy, their position.[43] "The peasants submit to the Statute," wrote a landowner who had been devoted to the peasants' cause, "...but in their own hearts they remain deeply attached to their own hopes, and it will be long before they give them up."[44]

As redemption payments were habitually kept up whenever the peasants had the means to do so, the government record of arrears in these payments becomes a reliable barometer of conditions of rural life in the years following the Emancipation. At the end of the period 1871-75 the sum of arrears of payments due to the State amounted to 22 per cent of the average annual assessment of the period; by 1880 it was 27 per cent, though the average annual assessment had increased. The government found the situation so critical that in 1881 and again in 1884 the total redemption debt was reduced, and in 1886 the poll-tax on all peasants was finally abolished. In spite of these steps, however, the accumulation of arrears in the payments assessed by the State had increased by the end of the century to 119 per cent of the average annual assessment for the period 1896-1900; that is, the total accumulation of arrears well exceeded what the State was trying to collect per year.[45]

The reasons for this progressive impoverishment of the largest economic group of the country were to the peasant summed up in one despairing cry--"Zemli malo!"--"There is not enough land!"[46] It is true that, in general, all the serfs received at the time of the Emancipation less land than they had held before, the reductions at the hands of the landlords

amounting to about a fifth.[47] These "cuttings," as they were known, were very important in the eyes of the peasant and served to emphasize the need he felt for more land. Lack of land was undoubtedly the basic ill for the peasants who had employed the famous "Article 123;" by this article the landlord could, with the peasants' agreement, instead of selling to his tenants the amount of land set up by the regional norm, free himself from these stipulations by giving the peasants gratuitously one fourth of the legal maximum. This clause was in much favor at first with the more shortsighted peasants, who were glad to be free from the dues and secretly had hopes of a new redistribution, but these "beggarly allotments" were to cause much disappointment later.[48]

When we realize, however, that the average allotment of a peasant household of European Russia in 1877 was about 35½ acres, while in France in 1844 the average size of all holdings, great and small, was less than nine acres,[49] it becomes apparent that the cause of the problem of the Russian peasant was more complex than just a lack of land. Of as great importance as amount of land is the combination of different kinds of land. The "cuttings" had been taken almost completely out of the pasture lands, especially in the north central part of Russia where the meadow was the most valuable part of the estate.[50] The forests also were usually owned by the landlords. The control of these lands by the landlords meant that the peasant could not put to most effective use the land he did have. "This," says Pavlovsky, "was probably the weakest spot in

the land settlement of the peasants after the Emancipation, and with the increase in population and the extension of arable at the expense of grass, it has been growing worse ever since."[51]

Pavlovsky in this statement gives us a glimpse of the prime factor in the impoverishment of the rural population of post Emancipation Russia--agrarian overpopulation. During the period between 1860 and 1897 the peasant population of European Russia increased from 50 millions to 79 millions; and, as was said, "every hand that held the sickle must also hold the wooden spoon."[52] By the beginning of the twentieth century an official calculation showed that in every one of 47 guberniias, or provinces, studied, the number of workers found in the villages exceeded the number required for the cultivation of the allotment lands by the prevailing agricultural methods.[53]

For the peasants, instead of using new methods with the old allotments, the natural thing to do was to attempt to extend the old methods to new fields. By every means possible they tried to acquire all the land they could, and in the black soil region they swarmed across the borders of landowners' estates to rent, and sometimes to buy, the proprietors' land. There are indications that in the eighties more than one-third of the peasant households were renting non-allotment lands.[54] The rent terms were usually short and gave no guarantees to the tenant, who thus tried to wring from the land all he could while he was there.[55] The years after the Emancipation

thus showed a progressive ravishing of the soil, and by the end of the century the impoverishment of the great black soil region had become another factor in the dismal agrarian situation.

The intensity of the distress which the increase in rural population brought was due mainly, as is obvious, to the general economic, political, and social conditions of Russia. For centuries the Russian agrarian economy had consisted of relatively isolated units, whether the manorial estate or just the commune itself. Now the Russian government in an attempt to modernize the country was beginning to build a vast system of railways, which would make it increasingly necessary for the farmer to compete with producers not only from all over Russia, but, with the growing foreign trade of Russia, from all over the world. And the payments in money which the peasant found himself obliged to make as a result of the Emancipation meant that he would have to make use of this expanding market mechanism.

At the local level, however, the agricultural system was still on a medieval level. Ancestral tools were practically the only ones to be found. The primitive method of cropping the land year after year to the point of exhaustion and then letting it lie fallow for ten years or more was still being used extensively in the north at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the central black soil region, the only slightly less primitive three-field system continued to be the prevailing one.[56]

Extensive farming had not given way to intensive farming. The country was still so little advanced industrially and commercially that there existed no system of thriving towns whose dependence on the countryside would stimulate diversified cropping and fill the pockets of the farmer with cash. Also, the populace of such towns would have been drawn largely from the swollen ranks of rural workers, turning them from sellers of agricultural produce into buyers. Lacking such development, the peasant continued to raise only grain to sell and, having no reserves which would enable him to bide his time with the market, sold it all immediatley after harvest, when prices were at their lowest. By the next spring very often his own supply of grain for food would be gone and he would be forced to buy with prices high.

Little capital was to be found invested in agricultural industry by direct means, either, that is, by large-scale capitalistic farming. It was hindered by the increasing financial insolvency of the noble landowning class, as they failed to make successfull the switch to hired labor, the consequent fragmentizing of their lands by sale or rental, and the existence of government restrictions, such as that of 1893 which restricted the sale of hereditary allotments to peasant purchasers.[57]

Measures such as the above were promulgated by the Russian government partly in an attempt to aid the peasant by protecting him from the merchant class, and partly in an attempt to keep the peasant class to itself and thus free from political

agitation. For whatever reasons, the policy of the Russian government toward the mir and the household was acting as a bulwark to an undeveloped system of agriculture even as the government was trying to increase its wealth. As we shall see, this policy acted furthermore as a chain to that mobility of workers which was the first prerequisite of the industrial revolution that would have stimulated Russia's agriculture industry.

It seemed sometimes that the peasant had merely exchanged one master for another. The land settlement of the Emancipation, as was pointed out, gave to the Commune, not to the individual, the responsibility for payments to the owner or government for land. The Commune was, in addition, responsible for the collection of other state taxes, zemstvo taxes, local taxes, and for the deliverance of recruits for the army. The demands upon the individual families had to be met by the Commune and were enforced by such measures on the part of the Commune as forced labor for any member of a family behind in his public obligations.[58]

The newly-freed serf thus found himself bound to the household and to the Commune by debts; to be able to leave permanently he not only had to have the permission of his father, but generally had to prove that some other Commune had already voted to receive him as a member. Furthermore, his chances of being able to sell his share of the communal land were greatly diminished by the fact that in the repartitional communes a household allotment might be transferred only with the consent of the communal assembly, and even if the transfer were approved and the land

sold, it would nevertheless have to be pooled with the other communal lands at the next general redistribution. There were no means after 1882 for the official registration of transferred hereditary allotments still under redemption;[59] with no real security of title, a purchaser was hard to find.

Separation from the mir had been made increasingly difficult as the years brought a growth of revolutionary agitation in Russia, for the government hoped by strengthening the Commune to create a bulwark against radical sentiments. These years also saw the more liberal thinkers, who had so eagerly hoped for an Emancipation with overtones of individualization, become advocates of the new theories of agrarian socialism, which glorified the Commune as Russia's salvation. The dissolution of both the consolidated community and the consolidated family was thus made more difficult. A law of 1886 made the division of a family and its allotment, in a repartitional commune, contingent upon the consent of the head of the household in all but exceptional cases, and required a two-thirds majority of the peasant assembly for approval, instead of the simple majority of before.[60]

The pressures of the heavy dues which each family had to pay sent more and more members of agrarian families from the farms in search of ways to supplement the family earnings. Though industry was still in an elementary stage as compared with the countries of Western Europe, both industry and trade had by this time been developed enough so that the average villager was dependent upon a certain influx of manufactured goods.

Every household, for instance, now had to have its samovar and tea. There was, therefore, a trickling off of some of the excess rural population into industry. But as the earnings of all family members belonged to the common fund, the wage earner's movements were still controlled from the country. He might not leave the district without a passport, and if the head of the household protested the authorities would not issue a passport at all. If the father wanted to compel the return of an absent member of the household, the police would take away the absentee's passport and send him home. Certain elected officials also had the right to deny the peasant a passport.

Laws and regulations usually come into existence when those making them feel there is a need for them. In this case, at least, the strengthening of the commune and the family from above seems to be indicative of a counter-current running beneath, working to weaken these institutions.

City industrial life of even an immature type promoted a weakening of those ties which held the peasant to the country. As the century drew near its close, industrial work was still for many peasants only an off season employment, to be abandoned when the needs of the agricultural cycle called them home--an indication of the semi-developed state of Russian industry at this time. And the majority of those who did remain in the city year round did not sever their connection with the commune. Nevertheless, partly by compulsion from the employers, and no doubt by the workers' own desire, these connections were relaxing,

as is shown by the decline in the proportion of short term passports issued in the central-industrial region in the 'seventies and the 'eighties.[61] At the end of the century 69.4 per cent of the workers in St. Petersburg were still holders of allotment lands.[62] With the rise in the actual number of peasants working in the cities taken into consideration, this is indicative of a gradual weakening in many cases of the ties binding the peasant to the household and mir.

The household was also losing its members by the steady stream of colonization to the East which continued in spite of all general checks upon the mobility of the village population and special obstacles to colonization itself. Furthermore, among those members of the family who remained in the village, patriarchal authority, without the force of the proprietor's authority behind it, was proving unable to keep the household from breaking up into small units. As if utterly weary of the constant friction of joint-family life, "everyone wished to be independent."[63] Nearly every able-bodied peasant aimed at having a house of his own, even though the economic consequences were to be disastrous, both because of the expense of building and maintaining another house, and because the old habit of one male remaining at home to cultivate the allotment with the wives while the others went to earn wages could no longer be practiced.

As the basis of communal life was an equality of holdings among its members, the question of economic and social differentiation within the village after the Emancipation is of

special significance in determining the real strength of the Commune. To what degree such differentiation existed, and whether it was increasing or declining is a problem still debated, and the statistics are not sufficiently clear or complete to give a definitive answer. Certain facts can be considered, however. Although the great bulk of peasant buying of non-allotment lands had been done collectively--that is, by the commune or peasant associations--the distribution of those non-allotment lands that were bought by individuals makes it clear that the majority of this acreage had gone to the larger buyers, thus strengthening those who were already strong.[64] Moreover, a government inquiry made after the turn of the century showed that in the Central Agricultural guberniia of Tambov, while nearly a third of the peasant households had no work-horses, more than a third had two or more apiece.[65] Facts such as these seem to indicate that some differentiation within communes had taken place.

If we examine the peasant's world, then, some thirty years after the Emancipation we find that those years brought a series of reforms which in their inception meant changes in the peasants' way of life. But the reforms were not completed, leaving the peasant to face new conditions without new means of responding to them.

One fact that emerges rather clearly from it all, however, is that purely economic factors were playing an ever increasing part. As Russia criss-crossed her hinterland with railroads, as she built up her foreign trade, the economic isolation of

a natural economy gave way to a village life sensitive to the fluctuations of a world market. Russia, in making legally free her greatest source of working power at a time when the industrial revolution was already an established fact for most of the western world, was unavoidably moving toward the devitalization of that great undergirding of peasant life--tradition.

It also seems clear that the course of these economic factors during the years since the Emancipation had been operating to bring the "average" Russian peasant to a more grinding poverty than he had known before. From a peasant whose farming was still almost entirely on a subsistence basis, payment in money was demanded on every side. In addition to the usual weight of state and provincial taxes, he now had heavy redemption payments to raise. Ready money was also required for numerous new items of expenditure. Necessities such as clothes, firewood, petroleum, with the killing of home industries by the spreading factories, had now to be bought and were subject to heavy taxation. The force of this dual burden, especially in a time of increasing world depression, was in itself enough to push a man toward pauperism. In addition to the problem of the cash nexus, the peasant had to cope at this time with his new status of being a member of a free rural population. The emancipated peasant, for example, if his cow was taken sick or a horse hurt, often went quite innocently to his former master to ask for another, forgetting he no longer had such claims.[66] In his worsening financial condition he had to learn that he could no longer appeal to

the landlord's purse. There seemed to him to be no promise of help from any quarter.

Moreover, though he knew little about concepts of civil liberties, it was obvious to the peasant in the course of his daily life that the advantages of this new freedom were qualified ones. If his attitude toward all not of his class was somewhat hostile, that attitude was only a reflection of the coldness the peasant received. The peasant to others was still a member of the "black people," and his work was referred to as "black work."[67] Arbitrary punishment, arbitrary restrictions on leaving the home village, the lack of legal definition of rights and duties, and oppression by a vast hierarchy of appointive officials all reminded the peasant of the social and political inferiority of his position. Now that the landlords' immediate power over the peasants was so much reduced, the police dominated the countryside more than ever. There was nothing that the volost and commune could do about it and very little that the zemstvo could. These zemstvos, which were to have meant so much for rural life, had indeed accomplished something along social service lines, in improving village conditions, but the peasants did not have much faith in the institution and were even likely to blame the zemstvo for everything, "although no one really knew what the work meant."[68] Perhaps this was due largely to the fact that the peasant was so lightly and indirectly represented in the organizations that the peasant members were seldom known to the average peasant.

Life was in many ways more drab than it had been in the old days. Old peasants recalled with nostalgia their part in their master's life. In Chekhov's story, Peasants, as the family spent the long evening winding silk which they got from a factory nearby, and for which they earned practically nothing, old Osip told them how they used to live before the emancipation; "how in those very parts, where life was now so poor and so dreary, they used to hunt with harriers, greyhounds, retrievers, and when they went out as beaters the peasants were given vodka, ...how the bad were beaten with rods or sent away to the Tver estate, while the good were rewarded."[69]

It is small wonder that the muzhik when confronted with the question of whether he thought things were better before of after the ending of serfdom,

> scratches the back of his head, and replies, hesitatingly, with a mystified expression on his wrinkled face: 'How shall I say to you? They are both better and worse!' If, however, you press him further and ask whether he would himself like to return to the old state of things, he is pretty sure to answer, with a slow shake of the head and a twinkle in his eye, as if some forgotten item in the account had suddenly recurred to him: 'Oh, no!'[70]

The Russian peasant of the early nineties, then, was aware of certain changes in his way of life, but his response to them was for the most part still made in the traditional patterns of his father.

He had unbounding faith in the ability of the Orthodox Church to watch over him in the after life, and in the ability of the tsar to take care of him in this life; and he was sure

that the latter must realize, as he did and as his father had, that the peasant's basic need was for more land.

Even if the peasant had considered the matter, he would have been aware of no incongruity in a government policy which emancipated him and then strengthened the power of the mir and the family, for his conception of how to use his land and freedom implied the existence of these institutions. No matter what may be said by others for and against the influence of the mir in the life of the peasant after the Emancipation, it seems fairly clear that he himself thought of it with approval, even while his practices were helping to undermine it.

It is true, that even in his own view, these institutions were no longer vested with quite the sanctity they once were. The multiplying family units meant, for instance, that almost every adult male was not head of a household, and communal affairs were likely to be decided more noisily, and perhaps even by "treating the Mir"--to vodka.[71] But to the peasant, his world still rested on the same basic traditions as before.

Another aspect of peasant tradition which has been alluded to but not examined, is that which for three centuries had brought the peasant sporadically to his feet in a frenzy of mansion burning, looting, and sometimes murder--the tradition of armed uprising against the landowner. Four times in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries agrarian disturbances had mounted to sweep large areas of the country at the same time, culminating in the great revolt of Pugachev. Under Nicholas I the number of local agrarian disturbances large enough to necessitate the intervention of the military had risen sharply.

This tendency to violence on the part of the peasant in attempting to settle some of his grievances was not overlooked by the professional revolutionists, whose activities first gained wide notice in the 'sixties. With that characteristic Russian losing of themselves in their new doctrines and that equally Russian impatience to put theory into practice, the narodniks, or "populists" of the 'sixties who glorified the virtues of the peasantry and the revolutionary commune were followed in the 'seventies' by the famous "going to the people" on the part of a group of young idealists. Many of the members of this movement went for social service alone or, as manual workers, went merely to be among the people. But whenever a more ulterior aim was present, it was to agitate for revolution among these people whom they considered the backbone and the hope of the nation. The movement, however, proved a failure; in spite of their attempts to make themselves a part of the peasant community and their expressions of sympathy with the

peasants' causes, these young revolutionists were neither accepted nor trusted by the peasants, who regarded them with suspicion and sometimes even betrayed them to the police.

If the political ideas of professional revolutionists made little impression on the peasant, it did not follow that he would not resort to his own kind of revolutionism if sufficiently provoked by the factors of most importance to him. From 1899 to 1904, we find this becoming more apparent as on some 100 different occasions peasants of European Russia engaged in agrarian disturbances. These disorders were for the most part widely separated in both time and space, but those that occurred in 1902 in the Black Earth Zone were concentrated enough to wear the appearance of miniature revolution, the most common manifestation of which was grain seizure. Typically enough, the peasants often claimed that they were acting in the name of a ruler who had replaced the Tsar and had authorized the distribution of the landlords' goods and estates. This movement was soon stopped by the intervention of the police and the military, and floggings were given generously as a "preventive" measure.

In February, 1905, important agrarian disturbances again broke out, when a group of Kholzovki peasants cut the timber of a private estate during the night and then offered "armed resistance to the police." This sort of disturbance spread quickly through the surrounding country, and continued throughout the spring. From May to August approximately one sixth of the European Russian districts were the scene of such disturbances,

which usually took the form of illicit timber-cutting and pasturing, and rent and labor strikes, but sometimes extended to arson and pillage. Autumn saw the peak of resistance and the spring of 1906 was only a little better.[72]

These disturbances, together with the great economic and political strikes of the factory workers, especially that in January and those in the autumn,--and revolutionary terrorism, comprised the main activity of the Revolution of 1905. In the tangle of causes which moved the villagers it is hard to distinguish the prime factors, but it seems evident that they were economic rather than political, and thus concerned with traditional grievances rather than revolutionary propaganda. The uprisings of 1902, the first serious outbreaks, and the majority of those of 1905 were in the Black Earth Zone, where the practices of renting land by the landlord to peasants who cultivated it with their own tools had led them to believe that the landlord had no useful function. This belief strengthened in the peasants their desire to satisfy their land hunger in some tangible way.

The very fact that the greatest agrarian disturbances were not in the north, where the peasantry had more connection with city industrial life and therefore more contact with revolutionary agitation of political parties, bears out the statement that the peasant uprisings had little political basis. It is true that the populist-terrorist Social Revolutionaries, and even the proletariat-conscious Social Democrats, during those years encompassed in their programs reforms of the type apparently desired by the peasantry. But both parties appear to have

been merely supporting what was already in fact happening, rather than giving rise to political participation on the part of the peasants.

Though the provincial officials continued to attribute the disorders to revolutionary propaganda, the disturbers themselves would seem to agree with the peasant who testified before the magistrate after the 1902 disturbances:

> No rumors came to me about any little books. I think that if we lived better, the little books would not be important, no matter what was written in them. What's terrible is not the little books, but this: that there isn't anything to eat.[73]

In response to a government questionnaire sent in 1907 to some 700 correspondents, the peasant group especially mentioned as first cause of disturbances the lack of land or of some particular kind of lands. Another important cause mentioned is harvest failure; and as it is true that the grain crop of 1905 fell below the five year average preceding the good year of 1904, and that the crop of 1906 was even worse, harvest failure was undoubtedly an immediate contributing cause of the agrarian uprisings of 1905-7, though the failure may have been itself partially a result of the disturbances.[74]

The Russo-Japanese War, coming in the midst of already troubled times was of final importance in causing the revolutionary outbreaks. The hardships of the peasant families which came as a result of mobilization, and the effect of seeing their own young men led off often never to return or perhaps to come home unable to lead a useful life undoubtedly stirred the peasants. Rumors about government bungling and about the extent of the

defeats may also have added to their peasants' discontent. The drain of troops to the East, too, meant that government counteraction could not be too effective for a time.

The Government was sufficiently alarmed over the revolutionary outbreaks of 1905 on all levels to include reform measures along with those of repression in its attempts to deal with the revolution, though at first these measures were so weak as merely to whet the appetites of the discontented. With autumn of 1905, however, came the two great concessions of the revolution; first the manifestos of October 17, granting inviolability of person and freedom of conscience, speech, assembly, and association, and declaring that no law could be made without the consent of an elective Duma; secondly, the manifesto of November 3, declaring that for most peasants the redemption assessments for the year 1906 would be reduced by half, and that all payments to fall due thereafter would be cancelled outright.

Lulled by concessions, intimidated by the flow of troops back from Manchuria who were proving loyal to the government, and completely divided among themselves, the revolutionists gradually ceased their activity. Peasant disturbances had died by the end of 1907, but not without leaving their mark on the policy of the government and on that of the landlords themselves. Having felt themselves most directly threatened, the landlords had responded with a complete reversal in their attitude toward the repartitional commune. They had formerly regarded the

commune as the guardian of the status quo; now, impressed with the fact that the most serious revolutionary activity had been in the south among villagers of redistributive communes, they came to see in the communes the seed of socialism, and agitated for their abolition. They argued that communal tenure must be done away with in order that the peasants would learn to respect private property rights and leave the proprietors' land alone. The landowners were thus ready to back the government in a change of attitude in regard to the communes.

The new policy that the government followed in the years following the revolution was for them actually, however, not so much in the nature of a sharp about-face, as the culmination of a slow turn. With over three-fourths of the population engaged in agriculture, the prosperity of the whole Empire, the state of the budget, and the political stability of the country rested ultimately on the crops and on those producing them. This the government recognized basically, but, with the different political ideas of the changing administrative personnel, the policies of the government did not always evidence this concern. Not knowing exactly how to remedy the situation the government tried, for instance, building grain elevators in the 'nineties, but when immediate improvement was not obvious, it lost interest and abandoned a project which was sorely needed.[75]

With the advent of Witte, as premier in the 'nineties, emphasis was placed on the development of industry in Russia. Though the needs of an expanding proletariat and commercial

farming would ultimately affect the peasantry, measures of direct reform of peasant conditions were for the most part limited to administrative matters. Witte wanted to loosen the provincial holds on the peasant so that more of the taxes would go straight to the national treasury.[76]

From the depression years of the early 'nineties it became increasingly obvious that something decisive would have to be done to improve the agrarian situation economically. Pressed by the insolvency of the peasant and the signs of their growing unrest, the government in 1899 took its first important step on a new road. In that year joint responsibility for taxes was abolished in communes where the land was held in hereditary tenure; in 1903 this change was made in respect to both the taxes and the redemption dues in repartitional communes. The government had thus started before the close of the century the change which would within the next ten years reverse the centuries-old policy of maintaining joint action as the basis of peasant society.

There was, however, no clear-cut plan regarding this matter, and the start that had been made was a slow and a hesitating one. Then two series of events clarified the course. The bunglings and defeats of Russia in the war with Japan, and the culmination of the perpetual ferment of the countryside into the Revolution of 1905 made it obvious that the foundation of the Russian superstructure, peasant farming, must be recast if the Empire was to remain. Exhaustive studies on the part of various government committees had shown that there was a

need for an extension of peasant landholdings but that this in itself would not be enough. A positive program of reorganization of agrarian life was called for and a strong hand to carry it out. In Peter Stolypin, who was president of the Council of Ministers from 1906 until his assassination in 1911, the man was found to assume this task of welding together an agrarian reform policy.[77]

The main feature of Stolypin's policy was the gradual substitution of enclosed peasant holdings for open fields. This, of course, involved the complete reorganization of the Russian countryside, since it recognized the necessity of doing away with the commune. The government, said Stolypin,

> has placed its wager, not on the needy and the drunken, but on the sturdy and the strong--on the sturdy individual proprietor who is called upon to play a part in the reconstruction of our Tsardom on strong monarchial foundations.[78]

The essential terms of the Stolypin agrarian reforms are to be found in three enactments: The Ukase of November 9,1906; the Law of June 14, 1910; and the Law of May 29, 1911. By these acts any member of a village commune was made free to claim the appropriation by him of his share of the communal lands, for which he received a deed of ownership. He then could have his land consolidated and enclosed (by the May 29, 1911 law this was made compulsory) at the expense of the State. If the peasant's share of the land was impossibly bound up with others, he had to wait until the next general repartition, but at that time the commune was bound to meet his request. Whenever one-fifth or more of the members of a commune called

for enclosure, the request had to be granted at once, regardless of the difficulties. A majority of two-thirds of the village assembly meant that the whole village would shift from communal tenure to enclosed property. If tenure was already of the heritable type, the enclosures had to involve the whole village community, which decided upon such a course by a simple majority. The head of the household became the legal owner of the family land, and collective holding within the family received the same blow as that of the commune had.

In response to the reforms, peasants proceeded from 1906 on to appropriate their lands at a rate such that by 1913 in over one-fourth of the villages individual ownership had replaced communal tenure. By the end of 1916, 10.7 per cent of the peasant families of European Russia had made use of the legislation of 1910 and 1911 and had actually enclosed their lands, thus holding them independently of the commune.[80] That these results could have been achieved within one decade, the last part of which was under wartime conditions, seems indicative that a section of the Russian countryside had during the course of the years since the Emancipation changed enough to become ripe for individualization.

Though true to a large extent of the whole country, the response to the new legislation was much more widespread in certain parts of the country than in others. Generally, the rapidity and extent of the enclosure movement was dependent on two factors: the degree to which peasant farming of the locality was commercialized, and the opportunity the peasants

had had to become familiar with the results of enclosed holdings. Examination shows that the Western provinces of Russia had a higher percentage of enclosures than the rest of the country. This can be attributed both to their contact with the examples of neighboring Poland and the Balkan provinces and of the German, Czech, and Esthonian settlers and to the fact that these regions were among the most commercialized of the country. The highest percentage of peasant enclosures of all was to be found in the southern and eastern parts of the Black Earth belt. The farming in these districts had been commercialized by the extensive production of cereals for the home and foreign market, though the cultivation was not of the relatively intensive form of the west. The means by which enclosures were effected was, in the regions of the more commercialized agricultural industry, likely to be by common consent of the whole community, indicating again how the popularity of the enclosures differed in the various provinces according to their economic development. It would seem to be evident from this fact that those communities more progressive at the time of the Stolypin legislation progressed more rapidly thereafter.

The effect of the reform legislation on the individual landholders within the community was, as was expected, a considerable transferring of peasant land within the members of the class. That this resulted in the proletarization of the poorest and the enrichment of the better-off at the expense of the less favored--as was so feared--is more doubtful. It is true that by the end of 1912 the average size of the area involved in a

transaction was far below the average peasant holding, indicating that the smallest holdings were being sold. An official data table for this period, however, for such provinces, shows that almost 40 per cent of these sellers disposed of their land because they were already engaged in outside occupations and did not farm their land. In other words, legal sanction was being given to a proletarization that already existed in fact. Sales due to poverty form the next largest group (17 per cent)[81] and this group did indeed become a new part of the landless proletariat. It can be said, then, that the reforms did not add great numbers to the industrial proletariat, but they were certainly a step toward severing the communal ties of many industrial workers.

Looking back to those who appropriated their land to farm and not to sell, as did the above group, we find the statistics somewhat in contradiction to popular predictions that those who would take advantage of the reforms would be the wealthier peasants. The first decade of enclosures in Russia shows that it was the average peasant who responded most readily to the enclosure legislation. Evidently those who most needed an improved yield in order to stay above the poverty line were making use of the reforms. This is indicated by the fact that the size of the average enclosure of a locality was somewhat smaller than the size of the average peasant holding. Even when we consider the fact that the enclosure average did not include certain common lands that often were still used by all the villagers, it is obvious that the average enclosed holding was not a large one. Furthermore, in the country as a whole,

the size of the average appropriated holding was quite a bit below the average holding per family. This was due largely to the fact that those appropriating their land were likely to be former serfs rather than State peasants, whose larger land holding had meant a more vigorous commune.[82]

Thus, whatever the "wager on the strong" might have meant in the long run, on the eve of the World War many of those who had enclosed land and were presumably to fill the role of a satisfied, stabilizing force, were still in the position of having less land than could well support them. Even the so-called stalwart independent proprietors might fall prey to land-hunger. At the same time, however, the very fact of asking for enclosures apart from any differentiation that might result had caused dissension in a great many villages, mainly those, of course, where the majority had preferred communal tenure. This is not to minimize the actual differentiation, which was apparently growing, though reliable and complete statistics do not exist. Certainly such a matter as the switch of top buyers of non-allotment lands from collective groups to individuals shows the tendency toward indivualization with its implications of differentiation. It is merely to point out that while the old community solidity was being weakened by the reform policies, the new group which was to form the basis of agrarian life was not only comparatively small but itself apt to be moved by the same old considerations.

As the picture of the peasant is brought more and more up to date, it becomes increasingly difficult to indicate the balance between the significance of the old and the significance of the new. The post-revolutionary reforms had started a transformation in peasant life unparalleled since the Emancipation, and perhaps even more immediate in its consequences. Certain changes all peasants felt. The gap between the peasants and other classes was no longer so wide, though the peasants were still a class apart. Much had been done to reduce the power of the commune over its members: joint responsibility had been removed, and removal or separation from the commune was much easier. The household had been weakened by the freeing of the junior members. But the major changes of the reforms, which dealt with land relationships, had always involved directly only a minority of the peasantry.

The laws had made it much easier for the peasant to break his ties with the commune and the household, but to assume that a great majority of the peasants did so would be erroneous. Even those who had appropriated their land remained for the most part under communal authority as to their agricultural activities, and usually used arable lands in common. The reforms had brought very little of the American frontier type of isolated farmhouses surrounded by their land, except in the newly settled regions of the east. The old village mode of living had been continued because of the difficulty of apportioning into solid lots equitable kinds of land and the expense of rebuilding, because in a large part of the countryside the villages were situated

near the only water supply available, and because the communal tradition was still very much alive. And on the other hand, village life strengthened tradition. H. W. Williams, observing the peasants prior to the World War, says, "Living together in a village, not scattered about on separate lots of land, possessing strongly developed social instincts, they are communicative, gossipy, given to lending and borrowing, observant of custom, retentive of tradition."[83]

Some of the latest investigations show that the connection between the factory and the farm was still a vital one. For instance, two-thirds of the printing trades workers of Moscow maintained important rural connections. Williams noted:

> All the cabmen of the city are peasants, and a heavily bearded cabman when driving his fare to a bank, a Government office, or a theatre will tell of the wife and children he has left at home somewhere in the government of Rizan, Vitebsk, or Nizhni-Novgorod to cultivate his few acres of land while he earns money in the capitol.[84]

This reluctance to alienate themselves from their land is apparent in the fact that rather than do even agricultural wage work, the peasants crowded each other to rent land at figures which would not leave them a return any larger than that of wage-work.

Like the city labor force, the army consisted largely of peasants still closely connected to their land. Through the conscription system nearly all of the men served in the army at one time or another. That this had a broadening effect on them and contributed to the weakening of the rigidly traditional communal life cannot be doubted. Nevertheless, as indicated by

such statements as Williams' "Nearly all the men have served in the army, but it is difficult to see what trace army life has left on them,"[85] the soldiers remained peasants. The identification of both the army and the proletariat with the peasantry, and the peasant concern with land, were important factors as Russia approached the World War.

The Stolypin reforms had diverted the peasant's attempt to obtain more yield from illicit use of land or outright seizure to an attempt to obtain land by private property cultivation, buying, and renting. But the need the peasants felt for more land was still there. Because of the economic backwardness of the country and the government's protectionist policy regarding industry, those who sold agricultural produce and bought industrial goods were pinched tightly by the converging prices. The old peasant custom of sweetening tea by holding a small morsel of sugar between the teeth and sipping the weak tea through it was still predominant, not out of love of tradition in this case, but because it was still necessary to make a small lump of sugar go an impossibly long way. Felt boots may have replaced bark shoes in many places, but poverty was still no stranger.

On the eve of the first World War, then, we can say that the peasant world was less solid than when we first looked at it. There was in 1913 more differentiation in peasant life, and that difference was both quantitative and qualitative, that is, not only had there sprung up in the villages peasants of different economic standing, but there were among both villages and

individuals ever widening varieties of methods of tenure and of agricultural development, of types of occupation, of concern with outside affairs, and with the future.

Some villages were wide awake; many still slept. Nevertheless, the fact that there were some elements of agrarian population who had during a fairly short period seen important changes in their way of life meant that innovations might be progressively less hard to assimilate. Over against this obvious weakening of the peasant world of tradition, however, must be set the fact that this world was still very much in existence for the peasant.

The 20th century had so far brought two important series of events in the peasant's life: the revolution of 1905, and the reform legislation. The former was based on a tradition of centuries standing. The latter, while in its effects weakening the ties of peasant tradition, was, it should be remembered, in itself based on a traditional responsibility of the government for the welfare of the peasants. Though mystical tsarism had given way in the daylight glare of modern economic factors and communication systems, succor from above for the peasants was still expected by them, and even recognized by all the other classes of Russia.

This was true because Russia continued to be what it had always been--an agricultural country to an overwhelming degree, both economically and in mentality. Any national prosperity and strength depended still on the solving of the problems of the peasantry. And to the peasant the basis of life was still the land and the problem how to get more of it.

The set of complete interwoven traditions which had made up the peasant's world had broken down somewhat as he entered modern times, making him more receptive to new forms. But the basic traditions had never given way, and he was likely to make the new forms rest on the old sanctions.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, Russia (2d ed.; New York; Henry Holt & Co., 1905), p. 405

[2]Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, The Empire of the Tsars and the Russians, trans, Zénaïde A. Ragozin (3rd. ed.; New York: C. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898-1902), I, 410-411.

[3]Ibid., p. 413.

[4]Wallace, op. cit., p. 460.

[5]Leroy-Beaulieu, op. cit., p. 410.

[6]Cf. supra, p. 4-5

[7]Geroid Tanquary Robinson, Rural Russia under the Old Regime (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949) p. 36.

[8]Ibid., p. 41

[9]Ibid., p. 37

[10]Wallace, op. cit., p. 56

[11]Robinson, op. cit., p. 39

[12]George Pavolvsky, Agricultural Russia on the Eve on the Revolution (London: George Routledge & Sons, ltd., 1930), p. 38.

[13]Robinson, op. cit., p. 34.

[14]Ibid., p. 35

[15]Wallace, op. cit., p. 114.

[16]Robinson, op. cit., p. 71.

[17]Wallace, op. cit., p. 117.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid.

[20]This belief that with the people, not necessarily including the clergy, lies religious truth is perhaps the most characteristic doctrine of Russian orthodoxy, and sometimes seems to indicate a feeling that the voice of the people is the voice of God.

[21]Baron von Haxthausen, The Russian Empire, in Walsh, Warren B. (ed.) Readings in Russian History (Syracuse University Press, 1950) pp.

[22]W. R. S. Ralston, The Songs of the Russian People (London: Ellis & Green, 1872), pp. 263-308.

[23]Wallace, op. cit., pp. 58-59

[24]Ibid., p. 57

[25]Leroy-Beaulieu, op. cit., III, 34.

[26]Ibid., p. 36

[27]Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[28]Nicolas Berdyaev, The Russian Idea (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948), p. 6.

[29]Ibid., p. 7.

[30]Ivan Turgenev, The Novels and Stories of Ivan Turgenev, Vol. I, Memoirs of a Sportsman, trans. Isabel F. Hapgood (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p.

[31]Ralston, op. cit., p. 30

[32]Wallace, op. cit., p. 443.

[33]Cf. supra, p. 4-5.

[34]Alexander Herzen, My Past and Thoughts, trans, Constance Garnett New York: Alfred a. Knopf, 1924), I, 29-43.

[35]Wallace, op. cit., p. 442.

[36]Pavlovsky, op. cit., p. 69

[37]Cf. infra, p. 25.

[38]Pavlovsky, op. cit., p. 77.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Wallace, op. cit., pp. 491-509.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., pp. 510-530.

[43]Wallace, op. cit., pp. 445-448.

[44]Letter from Yúr: Samávin to N. Miliutin, September, 1861, quoted in Leroy-Beaulieu, op. cit., I, 430-431.

[45]Robinson, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

[46]Wallace, op. cit., p. 483.

[47]Maynard, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

[48]Leroy-Bealieu, op. cit., I. 447.

[49]Robinson, op. cit., p. 97.

[50]Maynard, op. cit., p. 44.

[51]Pavlovsky, op. cit., p. 84.

[52]Robinson, op. cit., p. 94.

[53]Ibid., p. 96.

[54]Ibid., p. 99.

[55]Ibid., p. 100.

[56]Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[57]Ibid., p. 119.

[58]Ibid., p. 78.

[59]Ibid., p. 112-113.

[60]Ibid., p. 118.

[61]Ibid., p. 108.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Wallace, op. cit., p. 482.

[64]Robinson, op. cit., p. 115.

[65]Ibid., p. 116.

[66]Leroy-Beaulieu, op. cit., I. 467.

[67]W. H. Bruford, Chekhov and his Russia (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948), p. 57.

[68]Anton Cheknov, "Peasants," A Treasury of Great Russian Short Stories, ed. by Arrahm Yarmolinsky (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1944), p. 485.

[69]Ibid., p. 839.

[70]Wallace, op. cit., p. 467.

[71]Ibid., p. 475.

[72]Robinson, op. cit., pp. 155-156.

[73]Ibid., p. 152-153.

[74]Ibid., p. 152-153.

[75]Margaret Miller, The Economic Development of Russia (London: P. S. King & Son ltd., 1926) p. 58.

[76]V. I. Gorko, Features and Figures of the Past, trans, Laura Mateev ("The Hoover Library on War, Revolution, and Peace"; Stanford University, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1939), pp. 52-68.

[77]Ibid., pp. 491-515.

[78]Robinson, op. cit., p. 194.

[79]Pavlovsky, op. cit., pp. 134-135.

[80]Ibid., p. 142

[81]Ibid., p. 141.

[82]Ibid., p. 133.

[83]H. W. Williams, Russia of the Russians (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 347.

[84]Ibid., p. 332.

[85]Ibid., p. 343.

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APPROVED BY:

Lenore O'Boyle (Sig) , Director

Gaynelle C. Spivey (Sig)

E. E. Pfaff (Sig)

Lenore O'Boyle (Sig)

Examining Committee